



## Experts talk soil health—Newsletter article #6

*Written and produced by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service*

### **Different cover crops yield different benefits, expert says**

All cover crops are not created equally. That's both the beauty and the challenge of coming up with the right mix for each farm.

Jim Hoorman, an assistant professor and Extension educator for Ohio State University, says each cover crop has a special purpose – with specific benefits. Hoorman says legume cover crops, are typically used to produce homegrown nitrogen. Grass cover crops are used to increase soil organic matter, recycle excess nutrients, and reduce soil compaction. Brassica covers are grown to loosen the soil, recycle nutrients and suppress weeds and plant pathogens.

Other covers can be grown to suppress harmful insects or attract beneficial insects. Some cover crops may attract insect pests or become hard to kill, while others require little management.

There are hundreds of crop rotations to consider with cover crops, Hoorman says, so there's quite a lot of thinking to do when you introduce cover crops into your operation. For conventional tillers who want to begin a no-till program simultaneously with a cover crop, Hoorman suggests two cover crop rotations to consider:

1. Wheat, sorghum sudangrass, early maturing soybeans, winter pea or crimson clover with oilseed radish, corn, cereal rye, soybeans, back to wheat.
2. Corn, cereal rye, early maturing soybeans, brassica (oilseed radish) plus legume (crimson clover or winter pea).

For more information on how to “Unlock the Secrets in Your Soil,” call or visit your local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service office or visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov).

###